



RACE EQUITY ACTION PLAN

SPRING 2020

MISSION
PARTNERS



The following Race Equity Action Plan articulates the Mission Partners commitment to realize racial equity within our business, within our work, and within our communities—a priority that aligns with our company’s core values. We believe that if a business commits to being a force for good, it must also be deeply committed to challenging barriers that inhibit equal outcomes.

This action plan is a living document, and we will build upon it as we work toward our stated goals and identify new opportunities for equity. We hope that by sharing our vision and commitment, we inspire others to adopt more equitable and anti-racist practices and policies that create sustainable outcomes for their employees and communities.



INTRODUCTION

When we're asked what it means to be a Certified B Corporation™, we often tell people that our business model sits between that of a traditional for-profit business and a non-profit organization. As a Benefit LLC in the state of Maryland, we are legally held responsible for considering people, planet, and profit in every decision we make. And as such, we have a heightened sense of responsibility about our actions, to ensure that we build a business that is equally good for our employees, good for our clients, and good for our world.

It's one thing to say that, and another to dig deep into what it means to say that.

We are not only a Certified B Corporation, but a founding signatory of We The Change, a movement led by fellow women-owned B Corps™, who believe as we do in building a radically inclusive and richly regenerative economy. We commit to economic, racial, environmental, and social justice and a world where women are equally represented in positions of power and influence. And we are working towards our envisioned economy where business can work for everyone, and for the long term.

Building a business like this requires deep analysis of the systems, structures, and institutions at the core of traditional business and employment models to ensure we foster an environment that supports our commitment to justice and racial equity, and that is in line with our stated values. Because if a business commits to being a force for good, it must also be deeply committed to

challenging barriers that inhibit equal outcomes in business. It must be committed to actively identifying and eliminating racism, sexism, classism, ableism, anti-semitism, ageism, and heterosexism by changing systems, organizational structures, policies and practices, and attitudes, so that power can be redistributed and shared equitably. It is those -isms that have supported and maintained the long-defined societal norm in North America (white heterosexual male leaders who are Christian, living without disability, and who have access to wealth, power, resources, and networks), and which limit a society's ability to achieve true equity among its people.

It has been an especially interesting journey given the work we do. As strategic communications consultants working at the intersection of policy, philanthropy, and public relations, we've been at the decision making table with dozens of nonprofits and foundations as they have taken on issues of race and gender in their work: in grantmaking, board development, hiring and recruitment, all the while pushing our company along the same complicated, often uncomfortable, but necessary path.

Yet, for all the work we do with foundations and nonprofit organizations, many of whom have begun to document their race equity plans as well, there is far less of a barometer for business leaders, especially for small businesses like ours.

And so, over the last few years, members of our team—including current and former employees and contractors across the

business—have worked to identify, disrupt, and address policies, systems, and situations where we see signs of racism and white privilege as well as other inequities at play

It has not been easy. Shifting power to an envisioned end state of fairly distributed power and racial equity—when race or immigration status is no longer correlated with one's outcomes or abilities and when everyone has what they need to thrive—requires a willingness to get messy. It requires a vulnerability to try even when the right words aren't easy to find, and a commitment to wholly transform how business operates, knowing that the end result of implementing high impact practices through an equity lens, and actively pursuing equity, is a business model that works for everyone, and for the long term.

As this journey requires regular reflection and accountability and continuous commitment, we wanted to share some of our practices for those going through, or considering, a similar process. We share this framework as a tool for other businesses, and as a public barometer and internal accountability reminder to ourselves that there remains a long way to go to become an anti-racist organization.

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As long as you keep a person down, some part of you has to be down there to hold him down, so it means you cannot soar as you might otherwise.

Marian Anderson



II. GROUNDING COMMITMENTS

Members of the Equity + Accountability Team at Mission Partners co-created and mutually agreed upon the following set of grounding commitments to ensure full participation of our team in the practice and pursuit of equity. Some of these were developed or adapted by Mission Partners, while others have been crowdsourced over time from our network of clients, friends, and colleagues.

Be an Active Listener

During each meeting, members of the Equity + Accountability Team will be fully engaged and focused on the group conversation, and specifically on each individual's contribution to the conversation. There is only one "microphone" during each meeting and thus, team members commit to giving their full attention to the individual who is speaking.

Land the Plane

Given the varied and valuable perspectives in the room, we need to be cognizant of time in order to hear from everyone. We refrain from speaking in long monologues and share our point in the clearest way possible. This will allow time and space for everyone to contribute to the discussion.

Assume Positive Intent, Acknowledge Impact

At every phase of growth for the Equity + Accountability Team, members acknowledge that we are all continually honing our expertise and increasing our understanding of equity, diversity, and inclusion. In all discussions, we pledge to support one another in our individual and collective growth and we assume positive intent in the questions asked and topics explored by the group. Assuming positive intent will allow us to communicate positively, identify opportunities, and build trust but it will not limit or hinder hard conversations or different perspectives.

Move Up, Move Up

If you're someone who tends to not speak a lot, we ask that you please move up into a role of speaking more. If you tend to speak a lot, we ask that you please move up into a role of listening

more. This is a twist on the more commonly heard "step up, step back." The "up/up" confirms that in both experiences, growth is happening. (You don't go "back" by learning to be a better listener. On the contrary, choosing to learn how to listen moves both you and the group up.) Saying "move" instead of "step" recognizes that not everyone can take steps, while we can all move in body or spirit.

Meet People Where They Are

In any conversation, especially ones about systemic power (race, class, gender, etc.), we know that each person is coming to the conversation with different levels of lived experience and embodied expertise. As we move forward on the Equity + Accountability Team, it is important to recognize and accept any gaps in knowledge that a team member may have. As we grow together through our work, we will all evolve in different ways and learn at different paces. We ask each team member to share what you know, be open to questions, and kindly rephrase your thoughts to increase understanding, if necessary.

Use "I" Statements/Own What You Feel and Say

We will focus on sharing insights and experiences from our own points of view rather than generalizing or sharing on behalf of a group. Each member of our team will start their sentences with "in my experience..." "I feel..." or "The way I understand it..." We will share how we feel and be willing to take ownership of our statements through further explanation if the group has questions or concerns.

Own Your Own Story

We don't generalize or share stories that aren't our own without consent. We recognize that everyone is a unique product of values, systems, cultures, and experiences that inform their worldview. It is important to own our unique stories, speak from our own point of view, and respect the rights of others to share stories on their own terms, too.

Respect Diversity on the Internal Team and Client Teams

Mission Partners' Equity + Accountability Team members, as well as our broader network of staff and consultants commit to being respectful of the views, opinions, and both personal and professional experiences that each member brings to the table. This will help inform the way we approach our work internally and the way we guide communications efforts for our clients. This respect extends beyond the Mission Partners team to the groups of individuals, including clients, with whom we work.

Get Comfortable with Being Uncomfortable

Many of the topics we will cover may be difficult to discuss. It is important we hold one another accountable to achieving equity, no matter how uncomfortable the conversations may be. If we can't tackle challenging topics within the Equity + Accountability Team, we will not be able to tackle them with clients. We will get comfortable being uncomfortable as we grow throughout the team's practice.

Rumble with Vulnerability

"Vulnerability is not winning or losing. It's having the courage to show up when you can't control the outcome." —Brené Brown

We agree to be vulnerable and explore tough conversations together. We commit to not being yes people, but to instead make space for the discussions and conversations that require us to lean into vulnerability, to stay curious and generous, to stick with the messy middle of problem identification and solving, to take a break and circle back when necessary, to be fearless in owning our parts, and to listen with the same passion with which we want to be heard.

We acknowledge that our collective experiences are stronger than our individual opinions and experiences, and each person has something to contribute to the conversation. We all agree to practice being humble and look for what we can learn from each person in the room. It is important we each share what we know, and be willing to ask questions openly in order to grow together as a team.

Note: These grounding commitments have been developed or adapted over time by Mission Partners, while others have been crowdsourced from our network of clients, friends, and colleagues.

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Brené Brown



III. OBJECTIVES

We thoughtfully developed this plan as a team, with the following outcomes in mind:

- To **document and transparently share** our commitment to racial equity.
- To **operationalize our purpose** as a Certified B Corporation, and extend our intended benefit to all stakeholders, not just shareholders.
- To **hold our entire team—ownership, staff, and consultants—accountable** to our policies and procedures and to align around a set of shared goals. This plan will be revisited at least twice per year and our actions will be tracked and measured.

- To **elevate our commitment** to continuing education and best practices. We understand that this work is a journey and has no end.
- To **establish foundational practices** to guide and grow our internal team, which brings benefit to our community of clients, vendors, and partners, as well.

All of these objectives are designed to support our overarching goal for Mission Partners, which is to **increase equity in all places where we work, learn, live, and serve.**

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Injustice anywhere is a threat
to justice everywhere.

Martin Luther King, Jr.



IV. OUR COMMITMENTS TO EQUITY

What follows are our commitments, and some of the actions we are taking to support and advance them.

ADVANCING EQUITY IN OUR BUSINESS

- **We commit to building a racial equity lens into our organization's strategic planning policy, priority setting process, and issue area strategy and implementation work.** We have long deployed a high impact model of project management, but in January of 2020, we intentionally added a race equity lens to every project we take on. Our Equity Accountability Practice includes team members from across the organization who bring diverse perspectives and experiences, who are being trained in a shared language of equity, and who will hold fellow team members accountable to using the most racially equitable processes in our planning, research, client service, project management, materials, and campaign development. Our team meets biweekly to address and advance issues of equity across our work. This commitment requires continuous learning and will never come to an end.
- **We commit to removing bias from the hiring process while building equitable pathways to wealth-building opportunities and senior leadership roles for all employees.** Since 2018, we have conducted quarterly employee surveys to check in on our progress towards creating a more racially just and inclusive company. As one result of those surveys, in 2019, we re-engineered our hiring practices, organizational chart, and leadership team to ensure that every member of the organization can realize a path to leadership, including opportunities to build ownership stakes in the business. Since making this shift, we have found that 82 percent of our employees see a clear career path at Mission Partners, as compared to 59 percent just one year ago.

We also understand that having a diverse staff is itself an essential goal and that a lack of diversity increasingly has a business cost. Research shows that employers with more diverse workforces experience better rates of innovation and, as [Nielsen](#) reported recently, "with 43% of the 75 million Millennials"—a large percentage of our client and employee base—"in the U.S. identifying as African American, Hispanic, or Asian, if a brand doesn't have a multicultural strategy, it doesn't have a growth strategy."

- **We commit to eliminating adverse outcomes and barriers caused by the systems of oppression within our work and communities.** We take our role seriously as an employer and good community ally. We create an environment for all to thrive by offering a robust healthcare plan, flexible work from home policies, and paid parental leave, as well as a cash benefit to offset travel to the Mission Partners office. While most small businesses do not offer a 401K, we offer a plan that guarantees a minimum 3 percent investment to all employees after one full year of service, including access to impact investing funds that are in line with our company's core values.

» **On Parental Leave:** As detailed in our employee policies and procedures, Mission Partners provides up to 12 weeks of family medical leave to full-time employees. This policy includes four weeks of paid leave. Employees can choose to use their personal paid time off, which starts at three weeks, to supplement the four weeks of paid family leave. The policy mirrors the national Family and Medical Leave Act in that it ensures health care coverage and includes job protection. Finally, the policy has been built to be truly inclusive, the time off can be used for adoption, caring for an ill immediate family member, and personal medical emergencies.

- » **On Flex Work:** Mission Partners has always offered remote working options to full-time and part-time employees, with all employees permitted to work from home at least one day a week, and more often as necessary. Mission Partners' remote working policy—and supporting technologies—facilitated a smooth transition when stay at home orders were issued by the state of Maryland following the COVID-19 outbreak. Our team is now operating fully from a virtual workspace, and while the space between us has grown, our connectivity to one another has been strengthened because of the strong foundation we already had in place.
 - » **On Compensating Contractors:** Approximately one-third of Mission Partners employees have contractor status, which creates highly flexible working arrangements for these individuals. Contractors are assigned a set number of hours each month but have complete control of their schedules. This working arrangement has allowed several parents with young children to ease back into the workforce, with a fair and sustained source of income.
 - » **On Transportation:** In 2019, Mission Partners revised its transportation benefit to be more equitable and to incentivize more sustainable methods of transportation. Mission Partners now provides a cash benefit of \$50 per month to any employee—regardless of status—who commutes to the Bethesda office at least three days a week. This benefit can be used to cover expenses related to common forms of transportation—such as public transportation fares or parking—but can also be used to cover the cost of running shoes or bicycle maintenance. *Note: As a result of virtual work environments put in place as a result of COVID-19, Mission Partners transitioned this benefit to a work from home benefit, to offset costs associated with any home office needs.*
 - » **On Healthcare:** Mission Partners offers all employees working a minimum of 30 hours per week access to a group health insurance policy. Mission Partners covers 50 percent of the medical and dental insurance premiums for a regular full-time employee and up to one dependent.
 - » **On Childcare:** While Mission Partners does not presently offset childcare expenses, the company is actively reviewing possibilities of providing employees and contractors with a childcare benefit in 2021.
- We commit to pay all employees and contractors a fair living wage to support the long-term prosperity of our people and our economy.** Mission Partners is committed

to paying a livable wage to all employees. A liveable wage is defined by MIT as “the hourly rate that an individual in a household must earn to support [themselves] and their family.” Starting pay for hourly positions at Mission Partners is reflective of MIT’s livable wage for Montgomery County. This information is included in all hiring materials.

Mission Partners is committed to equal pay for equal work. We have implemented systems and policies to ensure transparency and equity across the organization, regardless of responsibilities or levels. Mission Partners does allow pay differentials based on measurable factors, including seniority, merit, and quantity or quality of production. These factors are communicated to staff in myriad ways—including in our employee policies manual—to ensure transparency throughout the organization. Pay differentials based on gender, race, age, sexuality, national origin, or any other protected class are strictly prohibited. Mission Partners also publishes its ratio of pay difference, from lowest to highest paid employee, which is currently at a rate of 1-5 times.

ADVANCING EQUITY WITHIN OUR CLIENT PROJECTS

- **We commit to actively challenge policies and systems—internally and externally—that perpetuate oppression, discrimination, and inequities.** For years, we have led with a person-first approach to communications. We believe that the words and images we choose and the way we use them characterize our identity, manifest our belief system, and bond us with or disconnect us from those with different identities. As language changes, we adapt and change to ensure we are using the most thoughtful and inclusive language possible. We do not always get it right but we are determined to keep learning. We center inclusiveness in our language and counsel our clients on how to reframe their communications to remove instances of discriminatory, stereotypical, or biased language and visuals. In turn this, creates messages and materials that enable everyone to feel that they are being reflected in the work.
- **We commit to supporting the efforts of organizations that serve those most affected by inequity and strengthening our role as an effective partner to those organizations.** We are intentional about the clients we work alongside, which creates an even greater imperative to achieve, model, and spread equity as a company and partner to these important allies. Through our work with AIDS United, we helped raise public awareness and Congressional support for HIV/AIDS funding in the Deep South where there is a

disproportionate number of African Americans living with HIV/AIDS, due in part to limited access to quality health care. In our work as an evaluator for Slack, we helped establish a blueprint for replicating an apprenticeship pilot program to shift perceptions and eliminate the stigma surrounding the workforce potential of formerly incarcerated individuals. Additionally, our support of the Family Independence Initiative helped elevate the importance of access to choices, capital, and social connections to help families lift themselves out of poverty.

FOR OUR WORLD

- We commit to prioritizing Black and Woman-Owned Vendors. We are proud of the alliances and partnerships we've built that support our equity vision. More than 65 percent of Mission Partners vendors are women-owned businesses including five organizations identifying as Black-led, African-American-led, or Person of Color-led (PoC-led). In 2020, we will also diversify our team of faculty to support Mission Forward webinars and programming, further supporting our commitment to elevate and promote diverse talent.
- We commit to creating an ongoing dialogue to explore and take action on key issues including cultural, structural, and institutional racism, as well as white privilege, influence, and power, especially within the content of our issue areas. Our Mission Forward® initiative offers both a platform for us to convene leaders on key topics while engaging in conversations with those most impacted by inequities. Since 2014, we've hosted community gatherings, workshops, and trainings to build more equitable communities from within and to learn and grow as a team.

We acknowledge that putting this framework on paper is an important, but still elementary, step. It is how we hold ourselves accountable to this racial equity action plan that will signal our effectiveness in advancing our vision for more equitable and inclusive workplaces, communities, and society.

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If you have come to help me you are wasting your time. But if you recognize that your liberation and mine are bound up together, we can walk together.

Lila Watson



Mission Partners is a woman-owned strategic communications firm and Certified B Corporation™ with a presence in Washington, D.C., Minneapolis, MN, and Montreal, QC. Our specialty lies in guiding purpose-driven organizations in realizing their greatest social impact.

As a B Corp™, our company voluntarily invests in meeting significantly higher standards of sustainability, governance, and giving back to the community in our daily operations. At Mission Partners, we believe business is a force for good and we are committed to providing an environment of mutual respect, which celebrates the diversity of thought, background, and experience. We believe the more inclusive we are, the better our work will be.

Since launching the firm, we've counseled hundreds of nonprofits, foundations, and socially responsible businesses across the U.S. and around the world, as well as the partners who fund and support their work.

Learn more and partner with us:

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